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# Leaving the Graveyard: The Soviet Union's Withdrawal From Afghanistan

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Conventional wisdom states the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was defeated in Afghanistan and forced to withdraw in ignominy. A closer look at history, however, reveals the Soviet Union from 1985 to 1992 capably orchestrated its diplomatic, military, and economic efforts to disengage from the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) on its terms, under the aegis of an international agreement. It left behind a semi-stable regime, an improved military, a dreadful economic situation, and a commitment to a long-term relationship. Throughout the withdrawal process, the Soviet Union relied upon the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev and Mohammad Najibullah to harmonize the instruments of power; developed a military strategy focused on controlling cities, securing major roads, and rapidly training and equipping Afghan forces; and used a transition plan that combined timelines and the phased “Afghanization” of the war. In 1991, four months after Soviet aid stopped, the Afghan government collapsed under *mujahidin* pressure.

This article provides a short history of the Soviet Union's efforts between 1985 and 1989 to end the war and withdraw. It examines and evaluates four key aspects of the withdrawal: leadership, the military strategy, the transition plan, and the economy. More importantly, the article mines the Soviet Union's experience for critical lessons applicable to the current situation in Afghanistan, such as vigorous leadership, a firm timeline, and a decade-long commitment of aid.

## ***The War from 1979 to 1984***

Afghanistan was important to the Soviet Union due to their shared border, a special relationship since 1921, and the threat posed by Afghanistan's slide toward chaos in the late 1970s. As the country teetered on the brink, the USSR's 40th Army invaded on 25 December 1979, “with the mission of

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rendering international aid to the friendly Afghan people.”<sup>1</sup> It seized control of the government, killed President Hafizullah Amin, and installed Babrak Karmal. The Kremlin viewed the intervention as a short-term commitment—the “Limited Contingent of Forces” would assume garrison and urban security duties, while the Afghan Army deployed to the countryside to fight the *mujahidin*. The poor performance of the DRA forces, however, pulled the 40th Army further into the war. In the first four years, the combination of a military-focused strategy, the weak leadership of Karmal, and the emphasis on transforming the country into a communist state caused the growth of a widespread insurgency accompanied by a steadily rising loss of men and materiel.

### **1985: Gorbachev and the Military Solution**

After becoming the leader of the USSR in March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev informed the Soviet and Afghan governments they had one year to make decisive progress in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> Believing a military victory was the only solution, Gorbachev favored a strategy emphasizing a variety of military instruments. Militarily, the Soviets increased the strength of the 40th Army by 26,000 soldiers to 108,000, secured population centers and lines of communication, and conducted aggressive military operations.<sup>3</sup> Utilizing “new, more aggressive tactics, a spread of the war to the eastern provinces . . . and an indiscriminate use of airpower,” the 40th Army and their Afghan comrades conducted regimental-sized operations in Wardak, Kunar, Heart, Kandahar, and Khost Provinces.<sup>4</sup> In a “bloody year of fighting,” 1,868 Soviet soldiers were killed with 1,552 wounded, as well as 3,690 Afghans killed and 8,898 wounded.<sup>5</sup> The military operations “came close to breaking the back of the *mujahidin*” but did not produce the decisive progress Gorbachev demanded.<sup>6</sup>

The Soviet Union increased training and equipping of the Afghan military as it expanded to 252,900 troops.<sup>7</sup> The secret police, Khedamat-e Etala’at-e Dawlati (KhAD), consisting of some 26,700 agents, arrested and interrogated insurgents, conducted counterinsurgency operations, and negotiated cease-fires with local tribal and militia leaders. The “most successful institution of the regime,”<sup>8</sup> the ruthlessly efficient agents helped the government maintain control of the population and counter the insurgency. The Ministry of Interior’s 90,200 policemen were an “able and effective” force; they fought the insurgents, broadened government control, and guarded government and industrial facilities in every province.<sup>9</sup> Organized into 21 zones of operation, the Afghan Army’s 146,000 soldiers supported Soviet operations and conducted a limited number of semi-independent operations. Unimpressed with the Afghan Army, their Soviet advisors criticized its “poor shooting skills and discipline, weak command and control, and failure to care for equipment.”<sup>10</sup>

Recognizing the military’s lack of success at the end of the fighting season, Gorbachev charged Karmal to distance his policies from communism, advising him to “widen your social base. Pursue a dialog with the tribes. Try to get support of the clergy. Give up on the leftist bent in economics. Learn to organize support of the private sector.”<sup>11</sup> In addition, the Soviet Union

used a variety of techniques to reinvigorate stalled peace negotiations. When the United Nations (UN)-sponsored Proximity Talks in Geneva reached an impasse in August, the sides had already resolved many of the more contentious issues. To assist the DRA, the Soviet Union increased its aid by 40 percent to 31 billion Afghanis, an equivalent of \$612 million.<sup>12</sup> Despite the Soviet adjustments, Karmal was not up to the task of orchestrating the instruments of national power—the 40th Army was continually frustrated by his inability to synchronize his political efforts with Soviet assistance.<sup>13</sup>

### ***1986: Najibullah and Afghanization***

Unable to obtain a military solution, Gorbachev described the war in Afghanistan as a “bleeding wound.”<sup>14</sup> He called for Soviet forces to return home quickly and switched to a strategy that utilized military and diplomatic instruments.<sup>15</sup> His decision was a de facto acknowledgement of Afghanistan’s unsuitability for communism, the Soviet Union’s unwillingness to make a long-term commitment, and his aversion to widening the war to stop the flow of arms, money, and fighters from Pakistan. To point things in the right direction, the Soviet Union removed Karmal in May. They saw his replacement, Mohammad Najibullah, the former head of KhAD, as better organized, hardnosed, and a “serious, pragmatic politician who understood the Soviet desire . . . to disengage from Afghanistan.”<sup>16</sup> Similar to his 1985 ultimatum, Gorbachev charged Najibullah with unifying Afghanistan over the next two years as the Soviets departed.

The Soviet Union began to “Afghanize” the war by turning most of the responsibility for combat operations over to the DRA. It continued to support operations with aviation, artillery, and engineers; worked to bring units up to full strength; and focused on professionalizing the DRA staffs.<sup>17</sup> With 1,800 Soviet military advisors divided among every Afghan battalion, brigade, and division, the advisors “coordinated the actions of the Afghan forces with 40th Army forces.”<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly with Najibullah’s background, security force development focused on the KhAD; it doubled in size in only a year. In addition, the DRA began widespread payments to militias in exchange for ceasefires—over 65,000 joined the payrolls in 1986.

Working together, Soviet and DRA forces conducted major offenses in Faryab, Paktia, Kandahar, and Lowghar Provinces.<sup>19</sup> In one of its first major independent operations, the Afghan Army and KhAD forces, with support from Afghan fixed and rotary wing aviation, captured Javara, near Khost, in April. In late October, the 40th Army conducted a symbolic withdrawal of six regiments to demonstrate the USSR’s commitment to disengagement.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, the international community misread Gorbachev’s intentions and disregarded it as a mere publicity stunt.<sup>21</sup> With the initiation of Afghanization, the costs of the war were about the same for the Soviets—1,333 killed in action and 1,552 wounded, but the DRA losses increased significantly to 5,772 killed and 11,876 wounded.<sup>22</sup>

Economic trends continued to decline as Afghan expenses rapidly outstripped revenue. To assist the DRA, the Soviet Union increased its aid by 12 percent.<sup>23</sup> More troubling was natural gas exports, the state's largest form of revenue, declined 16 percent from the previous year. To cover the shortfall, the DRA printed more money.

### **1987: National Reconciliation**

By early 1987, the Soviet Union concluded the situation was dire. Eduard Shevardnadze, the Soviet foreign minister, declared "in essence, we fought against the peasantry. The state apparatus is functioning poorly. Our advice and help is ineffective."<sup>24</sup> Searching for a way out, Gorbachev focused on modifying Afghanistan's political policies, pursuing an international diplomatic resolution, while continuing military and economic support. The improved orchestration of the instruments of power helped set the conditions for the Soviet Union's withdrawal in 1988 and 1989.

In early 1987, Najibullah announced the National Reconciliation Policy, a comprehensive plan encompassing a national ceasefire, a power-sharing agreement with the opposition, amnesty for political prisoners, and an offer to local *mujahidin* commanders of autonomous control and payments in exchange for ceasefires.<sup>25</sup> In the summer, Najibullah instituted land reforms. Afghanistan approved a new constitution in November which concentrated all executive power in the presidency, set April 1988 as a date for parliamentary elections, and declared Islam as the official state religion.<sup>26</sup> The comprehensive changes achieved "modest results" by the end of the year and addressed some of the *mujahidin's* larger political grievances.<sup>27</sup>

While talks continued in Geneva, the Soviet Union engaged the Americans directly at a September summit in Washington, D.C. Gorbachev proposed to withdraw the 40th Army in seven to twelve months after an agreement was signed.<sup>28</sup> He still hoped he could end American support for the *mujahidin* as a precondition.

Militarily, the 40th Army fought only when attacked and focused on training DRA forces. The Afghan forces continued to grow to over 323,000 soldiers and the militias grew to 130,000 fighters.<sup>29</sup> One of the most effective militias was General Abdul Dostum's legion of Uzbeks, known as the 53rd Division, which was used throughout the country with great success. In Afghanistan, 1987 marked the high watermark for security forces with over 416,000 DRA and Soviet forces fighting the *mujahidin* and controlling the population. US Army Field Manual (FM) 3-24 states the ideal ratio for counterinsurgent troops "falls within the range of 20 to 25 counterinsurgents to every 1,000 residents in an area of operations."<sup>30</sup> In 1987, the USSR and the DRA achieved a ratio of 32 soldiers per 1,000 members of the population. Nevertheless, it estimated government forces controlled only 35 percent of Afghanistan's districts.

Operationally, the DRA and Soviet forces participated in a temporary ceasefire in January and February but conducted major operations in Kandahar and Paktia Provinces during the summer.<sup>31</sup> From November to January 1988,

five Afghan and Soviet divisions participated in Operation Magistral, an operation to relieve the besieged city of Khost. The Afghans performed well and demonstrated they could defeat the *mujahidin* in a conventional battle.<sup>32</sup> Losses for the 40th Army in 1987 declined to 1,215 killed and 1,004 wounded, while they increased for the DRA to 6,229 killed and 12,786 wounded.<sup>33</sup>

The Afghan government's expenditures grew due to the ceasefire payments and the expanding military. Its revenue declined because of the cancellation of the back taxes of all refugees and the decline in natural gas exports. To cover the shortfalls, the Soviet Union increased its aid 83 percent more than in 1986 to 64 billion afghanis (\$1.2 billion).<sup>34</sup>

### ***1988 to 1989: The Geneva Accords and Phased Withdrawal***

From 1 January 1988 until 15 February 1989, Gorbachev combined unilateral declarations, negotiations, a dramatic increase in military and economic aid, and a two-phased withdrawal to navigate the Soviet Union out of the "graveyard of empires."<sup>35</sup> Within Afghanistan, Najibullah continued to use the National Reconciliation Policy but reoriented it towards regime survival and an Islamic foundation.<sup>36</sup> The skillful orchestration of the diplomatic, military, and economic instruments allowed the USSR to depart on its terms.

When the Geneva talks stalled in early 1988, Gorbachev made a bold, unilateral announcement to reenergize the process: the USSR would begin its withdrawal on 15 May without any requirement that the United States stop aiding the *mujahidin*.<sup>37</sup> On 14 April, the Pakistani and Afghan governments signed the Geneva Accords which stipulated that the 40th Army would withdraw, Najibullah would remain in power, and the United States and the USSR could continue supporting their proxies.<sup>38</sup> Although the agreement was less than ideal, it demonstrated a new commitment to political solutions and signaled to the other client states the Soviet Union would not abandon its third world allies. Due to an opposition boycott, Afghan parliamentary elections in April failed to bring the *mujahidin* into the government.

After the signing of the Geneva accords, the 40th Army conducted a well-planned and superbly executed nine-month withdrawal.<sup>39</sup> Phase I lasted from 15 May to 15 August and withdrew over 50,000 troops while turning over the garrisons in Jalalabad, Ghazni, Gardez, Lashkargah, Khandahar, and Konduz to DRA forces.<sup>40</sup> To shape the second phase of the withdrawal, the Soviets deployed a SCUD battalion and opened up an air bridge of supplies to Kabul. After a pause, Phase II occurred from December 1988 to 15 February 1989. The Soviets withdrew their remaining forces and turned over the garrisons in Kabul, Herat, Parwan, Samangan, Balkh, and Baghlan Provinces.<sup>41</sup> In addition to the withdrawal, Afghan and Soviet forces conducted Operation Typhoon, an air and ground offensive into the Panjshir Valley which killed 600 of Ahmed Massoud's *mujahidin*.<sup>42</sup> Overall, during the two-year withdrawal, the Soviets' losses included 812 killed and 685 wounded while the DRA's losses included 26,260 killed and 38,547 wounded.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the deliberate nature of the withdrawal, including the pause between phases and the steady



flow of food and military equipment, bolstered the confidence of the Najibullah regime.

As part of its long-term commitment, the USSR discretely left 200 military and KGB advisors in Kabul.<sup>44</sup> Although the Afghan forces' 329,000 men had led the last two years of fighting, the departure of 25 percent of the combat power in nine months, as well as the removal of the 40th Army's aviation and firepower support, resulted in a considerable increase in insurgent violence.

As Najibullah tried to maintain power, he increased money to opposition leaders for ceasefires and added 30,000 militia to the payroll. Soviet aid increased to 132 billion afghanis (\$2.6 billion) in 1989, partially due to the transfer of millions of afghanis worth of fuel, military equipment, and ammunition to the DRA.<sup>45</sup> Also, the USSR began weekly 600-truck supply convoys to Kabul. Revenue continued to decline when the Soviets capped the natural gas wells as they withdrew their technical experts.<sup>46</sup> Sadly, the war and Soviet policies had turned Afghanistan into an economic catastrophe.

### **1989 to 1992: Aid and the End of the Soviet Union**

As the last soldier crossed the Freedom Bridge on 15 February 1989, Soviet leaders were uncertain how long Najibullah would remain in power. While the Afghan government controlled the cities and roads with a combination of conventional forces, the KhAD, and militias, the budget shortfalls and insurgent threat presented serious challenges to the government. Yet the Russians' exit energized Najibullah; he "took much more courageous steps [with the National Reconciliation Policy] in terms of opening up the government and society, establishing links with tribal leaders, and shedding its communist image—all of which helped the DRA government to survive into 1992."<sup>47</sup>

The regime was immediately challenged—the *mujahidin* tried and failed to capture Jalalabad in April 1989, and the Minister of Defense tried and failed to conduct a coup in March 1990. Despite these emergencies, Moscow toed the line of no direct military support; however, Gorbachev pledged that "even in the harshest most difficult circumstance—we will provide you arms."<sup>48</sup> Surprisingly, the Afghan forces fought extremely well at Jalalabad and later seized the Paghman stronghold near Kabul. The insurgency, however, conquered Khost in 1991, significantly weakening Najibullah's grip on power. Then General Dostum and his Uzbek legion defected in early 1992. This, along with the end of Soviet aid, made Najibullah's collapse a foregone conclusion.

Even as the USSR slid toward its own demise, it continued to provide billions of afghanis in support of the DRA.<sup>49</sup> Eventually, the USSR and the United States signed an agreement to end their support for their proxies. When the Soviet aid stopped in January 1992, the Afghan government could no longer pay the militias or the military. Najibullah fell from power four months later as Massoud and Gulbudin Hekmatyar's troops occupied Kabul and its environs.<sup>50</sup>

Withdrawing while in contact is one of the toughest operations for a military or a nation to conduct. The Soviet Union's exit strategy in Afghanistan, while fighting a determined insurgency, plainly demonstrates the importance

of vigorous leadership, a secret police to control the population, airpower, timelines, and a long-term commitment of financial aid to the process. Despite the shortcomings of Najibullah's Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, it lasted a year longer than Nguyen Van Thieu's government of the Republic of Vietnam remained in power after the departure of the United States.<sup>51</sup> There are several lessons from the Soviet era that may apply to the current situation in Afghanistan.

### **Leadership**

The leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev was vital in synchronizing the instruments of power in Moscow and Kabul. From unilateral declarations to ultimatums to engagements with world leaders, Gorbachev drove the process with a firm hand. The willingness to replace Karmal with Najibullah demonstrated a practical approach to finding a leader who could harmonize policies during the USSR's departure. His decision to seek a military solution in 1985 and then use its failure to shift to a withdrawal strategy was brilliant. Finally, the achievement of a negotiated withdrawal without the commitment of the United States and Pakistan to refrain from post-departure interference was a tough but pragmatic choice.

Najibullah remained in power for six years due to his skill in mobilizing the regime's supporters and dividing the opposition.<sup>52</sup> Despite his well-deserved reputation for cruelty and intimidation, Najibullah was "a good organizer, a highly educated person . . . [and a leader who] did everything within his powers to improve the situation in Afghanistan."<sup>53</sup> His National Reconciliation Policy combined amnesty, a ceasefire, a new constitution, land reforms, elections, and the cooptation of *mujahidin* commanders to decrease violence and increase stability. In addition, his efforts to change the government into a parliamentary democracy in 1987 and a multiparty system in 1990 were substantive attempts to politically accommodate the *mujahidin*. In retrospect, the political changes would have had a greater impact if they had been put into practice in 1985 to complement the aggressive military efforts.

There are several parallels with the situation in 2012. Bob Woodward's book *Obama's Wars* describes US President Barack Obama as playing a key role in crafting the Afghan strategy, determining troop levels, and setting timelines. He has remained aloof, however, during its implementation with Vice President Joe Biden engaging President Karzai on a regular basis.<sup>54</sup> Routine, personal engagement between President Obama, President Karzai, and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani of Pakistan may improve the orchestration of the exit strategy.

Regrettably, Karzai has been characterized as a "weak individual, unfamiliar with the basics of nation-building."<sup>55</sup> Despite announcements of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program, he has not employed a comprehensive plan like Najibullah's National Reconciliation Policy to accommodate the Taliban politically. Most tellingly, only 2,497 Taliban reconciled in 2011.<sup>56</sup> Although the next Afghan presidential election is in 2014, now is the time for



the United States to encourage a slate of stronger leaders. Some pundits have suggested Abdul Qayyum Katawazai from the National Directorate of Security (NDS), former Minister of the Interior Mohammad Hanif Atmar, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, or Abdullah Abdullah could provide more vigorous leadership during the Coalition's exit. Personal engagement by leaders in Washington and Kabul, a stronger Afghan president in 2014, and a viable policy of National Reconciliation could assist the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan.

### ***Military Strategy***

The Soviet military strategy combined control of the cities and population, security of the major roads, an aggressive train and equip program for the Afghan military, and focused military operations to eliminate insurgent strongholds. From 1985 to 1989, the Soviet Union helped the DRA forces grow from 252,900 troops to 329,000 troops in a joint force comprised of KhAD, ministry of interior, and army forces. The focus on improving training, decreasing desertions, and developing staffs resulted in a marked "improvement in the quality and efficiency of the Afghan armed forces . . . as early as 1986."<sup>57</sup> The combat power of the 40th Army and the DRA forces from 1985 to 1989 provided security, on average, of 28 soldiers per 1,000 citizens, well above the ideal level for security during a counterinsurgency.<sup>58</sup> The combined forces conducted an average of 68 major regimental and division-sized operations per year. Despite the troop levels and operations, the Soviet leaders were only able to maintain control in an average of 26 percent of Afghanistan's districts. As Gorbachev stated, the Afghan problem "cannot be solved by military means."<sup>59</sup>

The United States' military strategy in Afghanistan in 2012 is similar to the 40th Army's: control the population, secure the roads, fight the insurgency in the south and east, and train and equip the Afghan forces. Like the Soviet Union, the United States has struggled to secure the population (an estimated 36 percent of key terrain districts were under government control in September 2010) with significantly less combat power—11.2 security forces per 1,000 citizens.<sup>60</sup> With a projected decline in coalition and Afghan combat power, the United States and its Afghan allies are at a security high watermark. As the number of forces decline, tough decisions will have to be made. Like the Soviet Union in 1987, the best future role for the United States is to train, equip, and advise Afghan forces; provide aviation and intelligence support; and assist with Afghan commando raids. Transitioning to this strategy will decrease losses of US forces, but will more than likely dramatically increase Afghan National Security forces (ANSF) casualties above its current annual casualty rate of 1.4 percent of the force.<sup>61</sup>

Afghan security forces have grown the NDS (secret police) to 22,000, Afghan National Police to 143,000, and the Afghan National Army to 179,610 soldiers.<sup>62</sup> Similar to the Soviet era, the United States has struggled with developing the quality of the force, resolving discipline and training problems, and limiting desertions. With the decline in Afghan security forces, an increase in

the size of the NDS may compensate for this lack of combat power through its ability to control the population and develop intelligence related to the Taliban.<sup>63</sup>

One area where the United States has lagged behind the Soviet Union is in developing an air force. The current Afghan air force consists of 4,956 personnel who fly 33 Mi-17 and 9 Mi-35 attack helicopters.<sup>64</sup> By 2016, the force will expand to 8,000 personnel and 145 aircraft, including additional attack helicopters and 20 A-29 Super Tucano fixed wing attack aircraft.<sup>65</sup> In contrast, at the height of the Soviet era, the Afghan Air Force consisted of 7,000 personnel who flew 240 attack aircraft including MiG-21s, Su-7s, and MiG-17s; 150 helicopters; and 40 transport aircraft.<sup>66</sup> The development of Afghan rotary and fixed-wing airpower is critical for transportation, reconnaissance, and fire-power during the transition; the 2016 goal may be too late.

### **Transition Plan**

The Soviet Union developed and implemented an effective transition plan to extract itself from Afghanistan. As Gorbachev stated “a clear goal has been set—to speed up our process in order to have a friendly country and leave . . . all our actions in all avenues—political, diplomatic, economic” must be synchronized.<sup>67</sup> Internal timelines to put pressure on the Najibullah government to assume responsibility for the war, external timelines to serve as forcing functions, and a phased Afghanization of the war combined to permit the 40th Army to transition responsibility to the DRA and withdraw.

In 1986, the Kremlin felt that Afghan leaders were content to sit and let the 40th Army fight the *mujahidin*. To change this mentality, Gorbachev charged Karmal and then Najibullah to unify Afghanistan within two years as the 40th Army prepared to withdraw. The planning and execution of a precision military withdrawal prevented Afghanistan from descending into chaos. The deadlines had their intended effect—as Gorbachev said, “They panicked in Kabul when they found out we intended to leave.”<sup>68</sup>

External deadlines were used as a forcing function to invigorate the Geneva negotiations. The earliest example occurred in February 1986 when Gorbachev announced to the Communist Party Congress that “We would like, in the nearest future, to bring the Soviet forces . . . back to their homeland. The schedule has been worked out with the Afghan side for a step-by-step withdrawal.”<sup>69</sup> The offers to Washington in September 1987 to withdraw on a nine to twelve month timetable played a critical role in energizing the negotiations that led to the Geneva Accords. Finally, the withdrawal timeline in the Accords was used to deny further requests by the Najibullah government for additional military assistance past the 15 February deadline.

Afghanization, or the strengthening of the armed forces of Afghanistan, the extension of Afghan government control, and the de-Sovietization of the war took place in two stages—1985 to 1987 and 1988 to 1989.<sup>70</sup> From 1985 to 1987, the 40th Army and the DRA security forces counterparts shared responsibility for the war, as the DRA gradually assumed the lead and the Soviet forces disengaged. From 1988 to 1989, the 40th Army focused its efforts on

the withdrawal while helping its allies with aviation support. Casualty figures from 1985 to 1989 clearly reflected the transition—Soviet casualties declined an average of 32 percent per year, while Afghan casualties increased 28 percent per year.<sup>71</sup>

The United States has announced several deadlines in Afghanistan. First, in December 2009, President Obama announced a withdrawal beginning in the summer of 2011. Later comments at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Lisbon Conference moved the transition endpoint to 2014. Recently, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta muddied the waters by discussing a 2013 date for security transition.<sup>72</sup> The shifting date for the withdrawal has diminished the timeline's influence with the Coalition and the Karzai government. Despite the possible effect on the insurgency, the White House needs to set a firm deadline for the withdrawal to energize the Karzai government, unify the allies on their commitment to Afghanistan, and provide a firm date for planning purposes. The declarations from the NATO meeting in Chicago are a positive step in solidifying a withdrawal timeline.

### ***The Afghanistan Economy***

For the past century, Afghan governments have relied upon high levels of aid or subsidies for financial stability.<sup>73</sup> In the Soviet era, the cost of a large security force, extensive payments to militias, and limited revenue from the sale of natural gas and customs duties created a country that was unsustainable without outside assistance. In 1988, 25 percent of the government's budget was provided by foreign aid, while 43 percent was financed through the printing of money, resulting in hyperinflation.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, the most influential factor in Afghanistan's collapse was the lack of foreign aid. The United States and its allies need to heed this lesson and commit to providing aid for decades to Afghanistan in order to ensure future stability.

The Karzai government's 2012 finances resemble the Najibullah government's in 1989. From March 2010 to March 2011 the Afghan government collected \$1.9 billion in revenue.<sup>75</sup> However, expenditures were \$17.6 billion, which were predominantly covered by donations of \$15.7 billion from the United States and other nations.<sup>76</sup> Despite future potential revenue sources, such as taxing the Aynak copper mine, Afghanistan will remain a debtor state for the foreseeable future.<sup>77</sup> To complement the deadline of 2014 for the Afghanization of the war and 2017 for a complete withdrawal, the United States and its allies need to be prepared to provide \$12 billion per year until 2017 and \$7 billion per year until 2022 to prevent Afghanistan from returning to the ranks of the failed states.<sup>78</sup> These figures will force the Karzai government to make tough choices, while maintaining the size of its security forces. More importantly, it will prevent a rapid drop-off of aid that could cause economic crisis and additional instability. The G-8 and NATO summits this summer represent a great opportunity to coordinate donors to support the post-International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Afghanistan. As Gorbachev remarked, "it is better to pay with money than with the lives of our people."<sup>79</sup>

## Conclusion

Afghanistan has taught harsh lessons on the limits of power to a series of powerful nations. The Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan, however, was not one of these lessons. As author Lester Grau stated, the Soviet Union left Afghanistan in a "coordinated, deliberate, professional manner . . . . The withdrawal was based on a coordinated diplomatic, economic, and military plan, permitting Soviet forces to withdraw in good order and the Afghan government to survive."<sup>80</sup> This adept orchestration of all the elements of national power did not occur until 1987 to 1989 when determined leadership, an effective military strategy, acceptance of outside interference following the withdrawal, and a definitive timeline converged. In the end, the Soviet Union's experience suggests that an Afghan government—with aid and advice—can cope with an insurgency, even one with significant support from Afghanistan's neighbors. In light of the USSR's decade in Afghanistan, the United States would be well advised to encourage more vigorous leadership from Washington and Kabul, expand the NDS, train and equip an air force that can support counterinsurgency operations, set a firm deadline of 2014 for Afghanization, complete a withdrawal in 2017, and secure the commitment of post-war donors to provide \$12 billion from 2013 to 2017 and \$7 billion from 2017 to 2022. These changes would enable the United States to pursue a responsible exit strategy from Afghanistan and leave a stable regime and a competent military backed by a long-term aid commitment.

## NOTES

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16. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 99.
17. Oliker, *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces in Wartime*, 71-81; Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 156.
18. Oliker, *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces in Wartime*, 43.
19. The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 32-33
20. *Ibid.*, 331.
21. Carolyn Ekedahl and Melvin Goodman, *The Wars of Eduard Shevardnadze* (State Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 189.
22. Giustozzi, *War, Politics, and Society in Afghanistan*, 271; Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, 317; and <http://www.scribd.com/doc/6737621/Soviet-Losses-in-Afghanistan> (accessed December 4, 2011).
23. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 161-165.
24. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 113-114.
25. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 146-147; Marshall, "Managing Withdrawal," 73.
26. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 147.
27. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 122.
28. Artemy Kalinovsky, "Old Politics, New Diplomacy: The Geneva Accords and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan," *Cold War History* 8, no. 3 (August 2008): 388.
29. Oliker, *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces in Wartime*, 26, 33, and 61.
30. U.S. Department of the Army, *Counterinsurgency*, Army Field Manual 3-24, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Army, 2006), 1-13; Steven M. Goode, "A Historical Basis for Force Requirements in Counterinsurgency," *Parameters* 39, no. 4 (Winter 2009-2010): 51.
31. The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 33-34.
32. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 130.
33. Giustozzi, *War, Politics, and Society in Afghanistan*, 271; Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, 317; and <http://www.scribd.com/doc/6737621/Soviet-Losses-in-Afghanistan> (accessed December 4, 2011).
34. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 161-165.
35. Seth Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), xxv-xxviii.
36. Marshall, "Managing Withdrawal," 76.
37. Ekedahl and Goodman, *The Wars of Eduard Shevardnadze*, 188.
38. Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos," 239.
39. The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 28-29.
40. Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos," 247.
41. The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 28-29 and 88-89.
42. Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos," 257.
43. Giustozzi, *War, Politics, and Society in Afghanistan*) 271; Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, 317; and <http://www.scribd.com/doc/6737621/Soviet-Losses-in-Afghanistan> (accessed December 4, 2011).
44. Oliker, *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces in Wartime*, 78.
45. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 161-165.
46. *Ibid.*, 161.
47. Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye*, 107.



48. Ibid., 144.
49. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 161-165.
50. Ibid., 175.
51. Najibullah lasted from February 15, 1989 to April 16, 1992 (3 years and 2 months). Thieu lasted from March 29, 1973 to April 30, 1975 (2 years and 1 month).
52. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 154.
53. Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way*, 411.
54. Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 66.
55. Jon Boone and Declan Walsh, "US Scrambles to Restore Afghan Relations after WikiLeaks Revelations," *The Guardian*, December 3, 2010.
56. U.S. Department of Defense, *Report on Progress Towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: United States Government, October 2011), 90.
57. Marshall, "Managing Withdrawal," 76.
58. Goode, "Historical Basis for Force Requirements in Counterinsurgency," 51.
59. Christian F. Ostermann, ed. "Record of a Conversation of Grobachev and Najib, 20 July 1987," *The Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) Bulletin 14/15* (2003-2004): 159.
60. Ian S. Livingston and Michael O'Hanlon, *The Afghanistan Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post 9/11 Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Brookings, January 30, 2012), 16, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/programs/foreign%20policy/afghanistan%20index/index20120516> (accessed February 29, 2012).
61. In 2010, Afghan Security Forces totaled 243,000. They suffered 2,113 troops killed and 1,498 wounded. This results in a casualty rate of 1.4% of the force for the year. For more, see Livingston and O'Hanlon, *The Afghanistan Index, January 30, 2012*, 6 and 14.
62. Livingston and O'Hanlon, *The Afghanistan Index, January 30, 2012*, 6
63. I commanded an infantry battalion in Paktika and Ghazni Provinces, Afghanistan from 2010-2011. I found that the NDS were the most effective ANSF group in assisting with counterinsurgency operations in both provinces.
64. U.S. Department of Defense, *Report on Progress Towards Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, 32.
65. Slobodan Letic, "Afghan Air Force Learns to Fly—And Fix Aircraft," *The Boston Globe*, January 18, 2012.
66. Oliker, *Building Afghanistan's Security Forces in Wartime*, 48-51.
67. Ostermann, ed. "Notes from the Politburo Meeting 13 November 1986," *CWIHP*, 144.
68. Ibid., 144.
69. Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos," 238.
70. See The Russian General Staff, *The Soviet-Afghan War*, 13-14, for the Soviet approach, and Dave Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet* (New York: Presidio Press, 1978), 268-279, for a discussion of the US approach to Vietnamization in South Vietnam.
71. Giustozzi, *War, Politics, and Society in Afghanistan*, 271; Urban, *War in Afghanistan*, 317; and <http://www.scribd.com/doc/6737621/Soviet-Losses-in-Afghanistan> (accessed December 4, 2011).
72. Craig Whitlock and Karen DeYoung, "Panetta: U.S. and NATO Will Seek to End Afghan Combat Mission Next Year," *The Washington Post*, February 1, 2012.
73. Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 6.
74. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, 162.
75. The World Bank "Transition in Afghanistan: Looking Beyond 2014," <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFGHANISTAN/Resources/AFBeyond2014.pdf> (accessed March 9, 2012)
76. Ibid.
77. The World Bank estimates in 2021 that there will be a budget shortfall of 25 percent of GDP or \$7.1 billion



78. Recently, Joseph Collins has suggested a plan to provide \$20 billion per year from international donors from now to 2017. For more see Joseph J. Collins, "Post-ISAF Afghanistan: The Need for a '15:20 Program'," *Small Wars Journal*, January 8, 2012.

79. Ostermann, ed. "Notes from Politburo Meeting, 21-22 January 1987," *CWIHP*, 146.

80. Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos," 235.